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BOOK REVIEWS

Outline of the Philosophy of English Literature. By GREENOUGH WHITE, A.M., B.D. Part I: *The Middle Ages.* Ginn & Co., 1895.

THE "philosophy" of history, or literature, or religion, is not only a somewhat old-fashioned and un-literary term, but at best a somewhat vague one. In Mr. White's hands the philosophy of literature seems to mean to some extent the influence of political events on literature; but chiefly the relation of literary subject-matter to the theological and sociological thought of the time. Very wide in scope is the purpose avowed in the preface; but it may be doubted whether the author has thus far been able really "To describe the process of mental development; to determine the limits and character of literary ages; to get at the basal principle of each successive age and trace its derivation from that which preceded it." The "limits and character of literary ages" can hardly be determined without recognition of the development of form, a matter which Mr. White largely neglects. Moreover, in determining such limits and such character he takes insufficiently into account certain phases of literary subject-matter which furnish forth elementary canons of criticism. One of these phases is the attitude of literature toward external nature. It is not possible to gain from Mr. White's book any coherent idea of how the nature-sense developed in mediæval English poetry.

The author's method is to give a running sketch of the general history of a given period—here he shows much skill in condensing—and, as the sketch proceeds, to insert each significant author, summarizing his chief work and explaining if possible its reason for existence. The neatness with which a man can be made to drop into his proper environment can as well be illustrated by a small example as by a large one: "War had been declared with France, for the political and military corollary of the religious reaction was a drawing away from the French toward a Spanish alliance. Of this war there remains a literary memorial of worth, for the king, wishing to kindle the

enthusiasm of his subjects by reviving the recollection of the great deeds of their forefathers in the glorious wars of old, gave Lord Berners as a task the translation into English of Froissart's Chronicle—a task which he accomplished with much graphic power" (p. 226).

The chief difficulty in the method is that the writer strays too far away into his patches of history. He says that "he has refused to regard any event in the progress of European civilization as not germane to the subject and has selected many facts that may at first sight seem remote from it to illustrate his theme." Having premised thus much he grows as wayward as likes him. Now while the reader may be willing to follow even into the quarrels of petty princes in Burgundy or the Empire, he will never be content unless the *cui bono* is indicated by the leader. To point out the exact bearing of continental politics upon English madrigals is of course no easy task, and better not done than done fancifully. Mr. White has indeed spared us imaginary correlations; but in so doing he has more than once left his facts inexcusably isolated. Even foreign authors are named without a hint of their relation to our literature. To certain men so named—Bandello, for instance—we shall perhaps have retrospective reference in a later volume. But can there be a doubt that some hint of such future correlations is due the reader? It is not explaining the philosophy of literature to print a history of English poetry and a history of Italian painting in parallel columns, so to speak.

The real strength of Mr. White's book lies in its discussion of such men in English literature as belong also to English church history. Wiclif, Pecoek, men like these are written of brilliantly. So too are the poets and prosaists (like Gower, Hawes, Lindsay) whose writings bear on the ethical development of the race. So important is the moral and religious element in our early literature that this brief, often illuminating view of it, is valuable. This fact makes up for any disappointment one may feel that the two centers of interest, the historical and the literary, do not properly discharge into each other.

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The Principles of Physics. By ALFRED P. GAGE, PH.D. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1895.

THE inclination of the times towards scientific study has naturally been felt in the secondary schools, and along with this has come, for